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THE CAMP FOLLOWER

We spoke, the camp-follower and I.
About us was a cold, pungent odor—
Gun-powder, stale wine, wet earth, and the smell of thousands of men.
She said it reminded her of the scent
In the house of prostitutes she had lived in.
About us were soldiers—hordes of scarlet women, stupidly, smilingly giving up their bodies
To a putrid-lipped, chuckling lover—Death;
While their mistresses in tinsel whipped them on. . . .
She spoke of a woman she had known in Odessa.
Owner of a huge band of girls,
Who had pocketed their earnings for years,
Only to be used, swindled and killed by some nobleman. . . .
She said she thought of this grinning woman
Whenever she saw an officer brought back from battle, dead. . . .
And I sat beside her and wondered.

Maxwell Bodenheim